

The Library Assistants' Association Series.

No. 7.

FIRST STEPS  
IN  
LIBRARY ROUTINE.

BY

*Wm. Benson Thorne, F.L.A.,*

District Librarian, Bromley Library, Poplar,  
London, E.; Honorary General Secretary of  
The Library Assistants' Association; Joint-  
Author of "A Primer of Library Practice."

The Library Assistants' Association,  
1915.

Price Threepence.



020  
T511f

14 May 1891.

# First Steps in Library Routine.

By W. B. THORNE,

*Honorary Secretary of the Library Assistants' Association.*

---

[The object of the following pages is to provide the simplest possible introduction to the ordinary routine work of a library, suitable for placing in the hands of new assistants for the purpose of giving them a general idea of the duties as a whole, and to render unnecessary many of the usual explanations commonly demanded when new assistants are appointed. Argument has been entirely avoided and direct statements have been employed to prevent confusion arising in the minds of the uninitiated, and while it is not expected that the instructions laid down will fit every case, it is believed no difficulty will be found in introducing modifications or amplifications where they may be considered desirable.]

When first appointed an assistant should endeavour to form in his mind a clear idea of the work of each department of the library; usually there are three, viz:—

THE LENDING DEPARTMENT (with sometimes a separate department for children).

THE REFERENCE DEPARTMENT.

THE READING ROOM OR ROOMS.

Occasionally there is a Lecture Hall in addition to these. The assistant will find that the work of each department in all libraries is carried on in accordance with a clearly defined system, and he should proceed to master this as soon as he can.

## THE LENDING DEPARTMENT.

It is here that are stored all the books available for home-reading purposes; that is to say, the books on the shelves here may be borrowed by persons holding readers' tickets to read at leisure in their own homes or elsewhere. In some libraries readers are permitted to go direct to the shelves to select the books they require, and these are called "Safe-Guarded Open Access Libraries"; in others they have to apply at a counter for books either by number or by author and title, and these are called "Closed Libraries." In many closed libraries a device called an "Indicator" is employed for notifying to readers the books "in" and "out," as well as for recording the issue of books, but some dispense with this and use cards in recording

p 41663

the issues ; these are called " Indicator " and " Card-Charging " systems respectively, so that three systems prevail, viz. :—

- The Open Access System.
- The Indicator System.
- The Card-Charging System.

In an Open Access Library an enclosure is constructed immediately at the entrance, in which the staff operate : on either side are self-locking wickets controlled by a lever inside the staff enclosure, preventing entrance to or exit from the book shelves without the knowledge of a member of the staff. Readers coming to exchange a book present themselves at the Entrance Wicket, hand their book to the assistant and receive in return their reader's ticket ; they then select a book from the shelves, proceed to the Exit Wicket, hand book and ticket to the assistant, who stamps the book with the date of issue, gives it back to the borrower while retaining the ticket which is filed with the book-card in a tray. The book-card is a card bearing the book's number, author and title, which is kept inside the book when the latter is in the library, and which represents the book at such times as it may be out on loan. The book-cards, together with the borrowers' tickets, are kept in order under the book numbers, each day's issues being kept separate, so that when a book is returned its date of issue must be ascertained from the date label, and then its card extracted from amongst those representing all the other books issued on the same day.

Those assistants in a library where an Indicator is provided will familiarize themselves with its parts at the first opportunity. The most brief examination will reveal that every number on the Indicator is attached to a movable block and represents a book on the library shelves ; it will also be seen that the number on one end of the block is printed on a blue ground, while at the reverse end the ground colour is red. When the red end is turned to the public the book represented is " out," when the blue end is displayed to the public the book represented is " in." It will further be observed that this number-bearing block is book-formed, and that it carries the author and title of the book it represents, in addition to which it indicates where such book may be found on the shelves. Thus this contrivance "indicates" to the public the books in and out ; it also "indicates" to the staff where each book is to be found, as well as various other details concerning it. Under this system when a borrower requires a book he first ascertains if it is available by consulting the Indicator, and having done so he asks for it by the number ; the assistant removes the block from the Indicator frame, notes author, title and location of the book required, fetches it from

the shelves, stamps the date of issue, hands it to the borrower, receiving in exchange his ticket, which together with the Indicator block is placed in a tray. At convenient intervals notes are taken of the number of books issued in each class, the borrower's ticket number and date are entered into the Indicator block, which is then returned to its place in the Indicator frame. In his examination of the Indicator the assistant will have noticed that the borrowers' tickets display coloured corners: these are designed to bring to notice books which are over-due. As the tickets are placed on the Indicator blocks they are arranged so that a particular one of the four colours is turned in the same direction for every issue during the week; each week the particular colour is changed according to an agreed plan, and by this means over-due books are discovered.

With the Card-Charging System in a Closed Library it is usual for borrowers to supply a written list of the books they desire, the assistant issuing the first one available after searching the shelves. The book-card is withdrawn from the book, the borrower's ticket is placed within a pocket attached for the purpose, and after the usual date-stamping formality the book is issued to the borrower, the proceeding being identical with that obtaining in an Open-Access Library.

Returning books to the shelves forms a considerable part of an assistant's duties, and it is necessary for him to be strongly impressed with the idea that too much care in the exercise of this duty cannot be expended, for it is of the utmost importance that books shall not be put in wrong places, for if this happens they are temporarily lost, and this is a grave reflection on the efficiency of the staff. As books are returned to the shelves they need to be examined for damage, loose pages, etc., and those found to be defective should be put aside for repair before being issued again. Books in a library are arranged on the shelves in a particular order. As far as possible it is the librarian's object to keep all books dealing with the same subject in one place, and also to arrange the order of the volumes on the shelves that books dealing with similar subjects shall be near one another. For example, it will be found that books about England are all together, and near them will be the works dealing with Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, while close to these will be books on European countries, after which will come those having the countries of Asia for their subject. Or if a book on Electrical Engineering is required it will be found near those dealing with other branches of Engineering and not far from those which are concerned with other branches of trade or industry. This process of dividing books according to their subjects is called Classification, and although different systems of classification

prevail they are all governed by the same principles. Either numbers or letters are used to indicate the different classes, although sometimes a combination of both is employed, and generally the books in each class are arranged in alphabetical order under the author's name. There is one exception to this rule, however, books of biography commonly being arranged under the name of the person whose life the book is concerned with rather than under the author, so if Southey's *Life of Nelson* was required it would be found under Nelson and not under Southey. Before they are ready for issue to the public books have to be stamped with the library stamp and labelled; some also require their pages cut with a paper-knife. First, however, they must be examined in order to determine if they are perfect, as frequently new books are "made up" incorrectly, that is to say, sections are either missed out, repeated, or misplaced: such faults necessitate the return of the volume to the bookseller. The cutting open of leaves is an operation which must be done with much care, or unsightly damage will be caused. A proper paper-knife is essential for the work, and a pocket or table knife should under no circumstances be used. When the top edge is cut the knife must be made to sever the fold of paper completely into the back of the book, otherwise the uncut portion will be torn when the book is opened. In cutting, an even, regular thrust with the knife will produce the neatest effect, and a short, jerky movement of the knife is best avoided. The library stamp is then applied at stated intervals throughout the book, the assistant seeking instruction in the practice of the library before commencing, as in some libraries books are stamped every few pages, while in others two or three impressions only are deemed sufficient. The stamp and inking-pad must be quite clean and each impression ought to be clear and well-placed, close to the printed matter of a page but not obscuring it. Most library books have two labels pasted inside the front cover—one on the cover itself, the other on the fly-leaf facing, the latter (called the "Dating Label") being usually attached only along one edge, permitting its easy removal when filled with stamp marks. Catalogues of books available are provided in all libraries. They are of different kinds, and an assistant will be a much more useful member of the staff if he devotes some time to obtaining a thorough understanding of the catalogue or catalogues in use in the library he serves. He should study intently the prefaces of printed catalogues; from these he will generally learn the principles on which they have been compiled, and how it is intended they should be used. Some catalogues are arranged on what is called the "Dictionary" plan, because the entries of all kinds—authors, subjects, titles—are all in alphabetical

order like a dictionary. Other catalogues are "Classified": that is to say they are arranged so that the titles of all books on the same subject are brought together in an order similar (to some degree) to the order of the actual books on the shelves of the library. These catalogues always have indexes, and it is a simple matter to look in the index for the subjects on which a book is required, and then to turn to the page indicated on which the books are set forth. People are apt to think classified catalogues difficult to use, but this is not so if proper use is made of the indexes. In many libraries a catalogue on cards is provided, a separate entry on every card, and these are arranged in either "dictionary" or "classified" order, but sometimes the author cards are kept apart from the others so that a complete catalogue of the books in the library is always accessible in a single alphabetical order. The assistant will probably find also a special method of notifying the public of new books put into circulation, and this should occupy his attention until he grasps quite clearly its plan and purpose. It may be said here that an assistant should never inform a borrower that a book by a particular author is not in the library until he has consulted the author catalogue, and it is always unwise to say that no books on any special subject which may be inquired for are available, as by consulting a senior officer something suitable can generally be discovered, no matter how small the library may be.

#### THE REFERENCE DEPARTMENT.

A new assistant will not be much occupied in the Reference Department at first, beyond an occasional spell of "watching" duty. He should nevertheless make himself acquainted with the method of issuing books. In an "Open" library, before being allowed to approach the shelves readers must write their names and addresses in a book provided at the entrance: they are then free to take such books as they require from the shelves for use at the tables, but they must leave them on the tables when finished with, and the assistant on duty returns them to the shelves after having examined and recorded them for statistical purposes.

In a "closed" library readers first consult the catalogue and then write the author, title, etc., of the book wanted on one of the slips ready to hand on the counter; the assistant then obtains the book for the reader and writes his initials on the slip in a space provided. Whoever receives the book on its return also initials the slip, which is then filed. It is important

to remember that a Reference Library is open to all, and is not limited in use like the Lending Library for only those holding readers' tickets.

#### THE READING ROOMS.

A record is kept either in a book or on cards of all the periodicals a library receives, and every one as it comes in must be noted. Periodicals are received daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly and quarterly; usually the record is arranged in the same order, so that it may be seen almost at a glance what are due and when. Each one before being put out for public use has to be stamped, some require cutting and some also need sewing. Even those that are wire-stitched, such as the "Graphic," ought to be sewn with thread; otherwise they are pulled to pieces in a very short time. Newspapers are commonly attached to a stand by a brass rod which fastens them down the centre: it is essential that the paper be evenly and squarely arranged before the rod is locked, or else several columns of reading matter are liable to be obscured under it, to the great and unnecessary annoyance of readers. Cases, with a cord down the back, are provided for most periodicals, the publication being opened in the middle and slipped under the cord which keeps it in place.

The back numbers of all periodicals are stored in a special room in some particular order for a certain time in case any may be required by readers. Each day the out-of-date publications which have been replaced by the current issues are filed away in their proper places, care being taken to keep each file orderly and to guard against loss. Many periodicals as they come out of the cases are sold to readers at reduced prices, and as they are taken regularly it is customary to place them in a drawer handy to the counter so that no time may be wasted in searching when the purchaser calls for them. Some magazines, etc., are preserved for binding, and it is the practice to post a list of these in the file room, to guard against accidental destruction or disposal.

#### GENERAL.

From the beginning an assistant should understand fully that the work of a library cannot be carried on successfully unless each member of the staff carries out his duties promptly and accurately. Accuracy and carefulness are the two most important virtues an assistant can possess: a healthy share of these, combined with an interest in the work, are the principal factors that

lead to advancement. A neglectful and careless assistant dislocates the working of a whole system, and his removal is inevitable as soon as his delinquencies are known. A wise assistant will seek instruction from his seniors when in doubt upon any point and will never act independently in matters out of his province.

Assistants should know that Public Libraries are institutions established under Act of Parliament and managed by the Council governing the town or district in which they are situated. The money for their support comes from the Rates paid in the locality they serve, but is limited to One Penny in the £ on the locality's rateable value. This limitation frequently makes the maintenance of libraries a very difficult problem. There are a number of books on Librarianship available, and the assistant should study these diligently as time and opportunity permit. He would do well to commence with "A Primer of Library Practice," by G. E. Roebuck and the present writer, which will direct him to further reading. Examinations in Librarianship are held annually by the Library Association, of which the assistant should secure particulars with a view to entering for them in due course.



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2017 with funding from  
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Alternates

<https://archive.org/details/firststepsinlibr00thor>

# Library Assistants' Association Series.

---

- No. 1. The Grammar of Classification. By W. C. BERWICK SAYERS, F.L.A., Chief Librarian of Wallasey.  
**Price six-pence.**
- No. 2. Libraries in Rural Districts. By HARRY FARR, Chief Librarian of the Cardiff Public Libraries.  
**Price three-pence.**
- No. 3. The Development of Notation in Classification. By H. RUTHERFORD PURNELL, Librarian of the Public Library of South Australia. Formerly Honorary Editor of "The Library Assistant."  
**Price three-pence.**
- No. 4. Report on the Hours, Salaries, Training, and Conditions of Service of Assistants in British Municipal Libraries.  
**Price six-pence.**
- No. 5. Ideals : Old and New. An Address to Young Librarians. By E. WYNDHAM HULME, B.A., Librarian of the Patent Office Library.  
**Price three-pence.**
- No. 6. The Library Committee: Its Character and Work. By W. C. BERWICK SAYERS, F.L.A., Chief Librarian of Wallasey.  
**Price three-pence.**

## Now ready also :

*Union Class List of the Libraries of the Library and Library Assistants' Associations.* Ryl. 8vo, boards, cloth back.  
**Price six-pence.** (Post free, eight-pence.)

To be obtained from the Honorary Secretary, Bromley Library, Brunswick Road, Poplar, E. Postage on Nos. 1-6 one penny each extra.

Reprinted from "The Library Assistant,"  
August-September, 1915, by H. R. GRUBB,  
86, North End, Croydon.

